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ABSTRACT

In 1997, United States Senator Barbara Boxer asked the General Accounting Office to address certain questions she had about education programs. The answers to her questions are provided in this report. The information centers on five areas: (1) the definitions and criteria used to identify the number of federal education programs and departments that administer them; (2) the number of funded federal education programs providing direct instructional assistance and indirect instructional assistance to students in kindergarten through grade 12; (3) current data on how the Title I program has been working since its 1994 reauthorization; (4) the "catch 22" that federal policymakers face in wanting both accountability and more state and local flexibility; and (5) information on Performance Partnership Grants. The information is intended to help lawmakers make decisions about federal funding for education programs. Using definitions of direct and indirect instructional assistance, 69 funded programs within the Department of Education for students in kindergarten through grade 12 were identified. It was also found that balancing the need for federal accountability with that for state and local flexibility can present a challenge for federal policymakers. (RJM)

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ED 418 505

B-279027

January 21, 1998

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
United States Senate

Subject: Federal Education Funding: Multiple Programs and Lack of Data Raise Efficiency and Effectiveness Concerns (Supplemental Information to Testimony)

Dear Senator Boxer:

In our November 1997 testimony before the Senate Budget Committee's Education Task Force, we discussed federal education funding.[1] We highlighted the numerous multiple education programs administered by more than 30 federal agencies and discussed the challenges in obtaining important information about these programs and their outcomes. As a result of that testimony, you asked us to provide supplemental information on (1) the definition and criteria we used to identify the number of federal education programs and departments that administer them, (2) the number of funded federal education programs providing direct instructional assistance and indirect instructional assistance to students in kindergarten through grade 12, (3) current data on how the Title I program has been working since its 1994 reauthorization, (4) the "catch 22" federal policymakers face in wanting both accountability and more state and local flexibility, and (5) information on Performance Partnership Grants.

In summary, in our November 1997 testimony, we did not develop our own definition of "education" or establish criteria to determine the number of departments and agencies that administer federal education programs. Instead, we relied on a Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) analysis.[2] The NCES report does not include its definition of

[1]See Federal Education Funding: Multiple Programs and Lack of Data Raise Efficiency and Effectiveness Concerns (GAO/T-HEHS-98-46, Nov. 6, 1997).

[2]GAO/T-HEHS-98-46, Nov. 6, 1997, p. 2.

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the term "education." Our 1995 count of federal education programs administered by the Department of Education was also based on Department of Education analyses.[3] We determined the number of education programs administered by other agencies by analyzing Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) program entries and selecting the ones that CFDA described as having an education component.[4]

Using your definitions of direct and indirect instructional assistance, we identified 69 funded programs within the Department of Education for students in kindergarten through grade 12. Of these, 10 programs provided primarily direct instructional assistance, 55 provided indirect instructional assistance, and 4 provided both types of assistance. The classifications in this section did not have the benefit of input from the Department of Education. Although we briefly discussed our methodology and classifications with officials in the Department, the Department could not provide us with detailed comments in the required time periods.

We have not undertaken a comprehensive review of how Title I has been working since its 1994 reauthorization. However, the Department of Education has a number of ongoing and planned studies that should provide data on the program's performance and student achievement.

Balancing the need for federal accountability with that for state and local flexibility can present a challenge for federal policymakers. For example, reducing reporting requirements and providing broad program objectives can result in less information about how well a program is achieving its objectives. Performance partnerships, as envisioned by the administration, address this challenge by consolidating funding streams and assessing a program's success on the basis of performance measures developed in partnership by the federal, state, and local governments and local service providers.

We have provided responses to each of the questions you raised in the following enclosures. Enclosure I contains information in response to your three questions on the definition and criteria we used in determining the number of education programs and the agencies and departments that administer them. Based on your definitions of direct and indirect instructional support, enclosure II contains information about the federal education programs that provide these

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[3]Department of Education: Information on Consolidation Opportunities and Student Aid (GAO/T-HEHS-95-130, Apr. 6, 1995), p. 1.

[4]U.S. Department of Education, Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance.

kinds of assistance to students in kindergarten through grade 12. In enclosure III, we provide information about studies of the Title I program. Enclosure IV addresses accountability needs and state and local flexibility. Enclosure V provides information on performance partnerships. In addition, as indicated in the enclosures, we have provided you with copies of relevant GAO reports and other materials to supplement our replies.

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I hope this information will assist you as you make important decisions about federal funding for education programs. If you have any questions, or would like to discuss this material further, please call me at (202) 512-7014. Major contributors to this report included Eleanor Johnson, Assistant Director; Gail MacColl, Assistant Director; Sandra L. Baxter, Senior Evaluator; Ellen Schwartz, Senior Evaluator; and Kathleen White, Senior Evaluator.

Sincerely yours,

Carlotta C. Joyner, Director
Education and Employment Issues

Enclosures - 5

DEFINITIONS

Information Requested

(1) Please supply the definition of "education" that led to GAO's assessment that more than 30 departments or agencies run such programs. (2) Please explain the criteria used to determine whether a program met that definition, such as population served or location of services. (3) Please supply the definition of education programs used in the 1995 GAO report you referenced that counted 652 education programs, 244 of which were administered by the Department of Education.[5]

Response

Our identification of departments and agencies that administer federal education programs was based on a National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) analysis of federal education funding.[6] We counted the number of federal departments and agencies NCES reported as having education programs that received federal funding in fiscal year 1997. The NCES report does not specifically state a definition for education or enumerate the criteria NCES used to determine whether a program satisfied that definition. However, NCES reported that its list of federal education programs included programs in all federal agencies and departments with "significant educational components, even if these programs had additional purposes."[7]

In our 1995 testimony on opportunities for consolidating federal education programs and student aid, we identified 244 education programs administered by the Department of Education and another 308 programs administered by 30 other federal agencies in fiscal year 1995.[8] We did not define education but used a list of programs that the Department of Education officials developed and provided to us. In addition, we analyzed information

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[5]The inquiry refers to testimony we provided in 1995 before the Subcommittee on Human Resources and Intergovernmental Relations, Committee on Government Reform and Oversight. See GAO/T-HEHS-95-130, Apr. 6, 1995. At that time, we testified that there were 552 federal education programs, 224 of which were administered by the Department of Education. In response to a question at the November 1997 hearing, this number was accidentally misstated as "652."

[6]For additional information, see Department of Education, NCES, Federal Support for Education: Fiscal Years 1980 to 1997 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 1997).

[7]Department of Education, NCES, Federal Support for Education, p. 1.

[8]See GAO/T-HEHS-95-130, Apr. 6, 1995.

from the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) to determine the number of programs administered by other federal departments and agencies that had education components.

TYPES OF FEDERAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Information Requested

(4) Please list the federal education programs that meet the following narrower definition: A program with a primary purpose of direct instructional assistance to K-12 students. (5) Please provide a list of programs that have a primary purpose of indirect instruction assistance for K-12 students, such as teacher training, programs involving technology use in K-12 settings, and reform efforts to improve student achievement and graduation rates. Please include in these lists only programs which are funded, and indicate which programs are formula funded and which are competitively funded.

Response

Table II.1 provides the information you requested for programs that primarily support direct instruction for students in kindergarten through 12th grade. Table II.2 provides the information you requested for programs with a primary purpose of indirect instructional assistance. In addition, we have included in table II.3 a list of programs that may provide either direct or indirect instructional assistance for students in kindergarten through grade 12, depending on the discretion of school officials or the results of grant competitions.

Table II.1: Education Department Programs With Direct Instruction Assistance for K-12 Students as the Primary Purpose With FY 97 Grant Amount (in Millions)

Count	CFDA[a] no.	Program name	Formula grants	Discretionary grants[b]	Other[c]	Targeted beneficiaries
1	84.003	Bilingual Education		X ($157)		Limited-English-proficient individuals
2	84.010	Title I Grants to Local Education Agencies (Title I Basic and Concentration)	X ($7,300)			At-risk children
3	84.011	Migrant Education–Basic State Grant Program	x ($300)			Children of migrant workers
4	84.013	Title I Program for Neglected and Delinquent Children	X ($39)			Children in state correctional institutions or state community day schools
5	84.027	Special Education–Grants to States	X ($3,109)			Children with disabilities aged 3-21
6	84.048	Vocational Education–Basic Grants to States	X ($1,016)			Secondary school, post-secondary, and adult students
7	84.162	Immigrant Education	X ($100)			Immigrant children in public and private schools
8	84.165	Magnet Schools Assistance		X ($95)		Students in magnet schools
9	84.203	Star Schools		X ($30)		Students and teachers
10	84.243	Tech-Prep Education	X ($100)	X		Secondary/ postsecondary technical education students

[a]Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance, 1997.

[b]Includes competitive grants, contracts, and cooperative agreements.

[c]Includes direct payments for specified uses of funds and for dissemination costs.

Table II.2: Education Department Programs With Indirect Assistance for K-12 Students as the Primary Purpose With FY 97 Grant Amount (in Millions)

Count	CFDA[a] no.	Program name	Formula grants	Discretionary grants[b]	Other[c]	Targeted beneficiaries
1	84.023	Special Education–Innovation and Development		X ($16)		Infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities
2	84.024	Early Education for Children with Disabilities		X ($25)		Infants, toddlers, and children under aged 8 with disabilities
3	84.025	Services for Children with Deaf-Blindness		X ($13)		Deaf-blind children
4	84.026	Media and Captioning Services for Individuals with Disabilities		X ($20)		Hearing and visually impaired individuals
5	84.028	Special Education–Regional Resource Centers		X ($6)		Infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities
6	84.029	Special Education-Personnel Development and Parent Training		X (108.9)		Training for parents, teachers, and related services providers to benefit children with disabilities
7	84.030	Clearinghouses for Individuals with Disabilities		X ($2)		Information dissemination for children with disabilities
8	84.044	Trio-Talent Search		X ($82)		Low-income individuals aged 11-27
9	84.047	Trio-Upward Bound		X ($198)		Low-income youth in grades 9-11
10	84.051	National Vocational Education Research		X ($7)		Educational professionals

ENCLOSURE II

Count	CFDA[a] no.	Program name	Formula grants	Discretionary grants[b]	Other[c]	Targeted beneficiaries
11	84.086	Special Education–Program for Severely Disabled Children		X ($4.1)		Infants, toddlers, children, and youth with severe disabilities
12	84.101	Vocational Education–Indians Set-Aside		X ($13)		Secondary and postsecondary students in BIA schools
13	84.141	Migrant Education–High School Equivalency Program		X ($7.4)		Migrant workers aged 16 and older
14	84.144	Migrant Education–Coordination Program		X ($6)		Children of migrant workers
15	84.158	Secondary Education and Transitional Services for Youth with Disabilities		X ($24)		Youths with disabilities in and out of school
16	84.159	Special Education–Special Studies for Persons with Disabilities		X ($4)		Individuals with disabilities
17	84.168	Eisenhower Professional Development–National Activities		X ($310)		Teachers of students in grades K-12
18	84.180	Technology Applications for Individuals with Disabilities		X ($10)		Children an youth with disabilities
19	84.184	Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities–National Program		X ($25)		Students, teachers, and parents
20	84.186	Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities–State Grants	X ($531)			Students and teachers
21	84.194	Bilingual Education–Support Services		X ($10)		Bilingual students

Count	CFDA[a] no.	Program name	Formula grants	Discretionary grants[b]	Other[c]	Targeted beneficiaries
22	84.195	Bilingual Education–Teacher Training		X ($5)		Bilingual teachers
23	84.206	Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Grant Program		X ($5)		Gifted, school-aged children
24	84.210	Native Hawaiian Gifted and Talented		X ($1.5)		Gifted, school-aged, native Hawaiian children
25	84.215	Fund for the Improvement of Education		X ($40)		Educational agencies and organizations
26	84.216	Capital Expenses	X	X ($41)		At-risk students
27	84.221	Native Hawaiian Special Education		X ($1.5)		Native Hawaiian children with disabilities
28	84.224	State Grants for Assistive Technology		X ($36)		Individuals of all ages with disabilities
29	84.237	Special Education–Program for Children with Serious Emotional Disturbances		X ($4.1)		Infants, toddlers, and youth with serious emotional disturbances
30	84.256	Educational Grant Program for the Freely Associated States		X ($5)		Children in Palua, Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands
31	84.262	Minority Teacher Recruitment		X ($2)		Minority teachers
32	84.276	Goals 2000–State and Local Education Systemic Improvement Grants	X ($476)			Students grades K-12

ENCLOSURE II

Count	CFDA[a] no.	Program name	Formula grants	Discretionary grants[b]	Other[c]	Targeted beneficiaries
33	84.281	Eisenhower Professional Development State Grants	X ($310)			Professional educators
34	84.282	Charter Schools		X ($51)		Children in charter schools
35	84.283	Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center			X ($25.5)	Elementary and secondary school students
36	84.286	Telecommunications Demonstration Project for Mathematics		X ($1)		Schools with a high percentage of at-risk students
37	84.287	After School Learning Centers		X ($1)		Inner-city and rural youths
38	84.289	Bilingual Education–Program Enhancement Grants		X ($10.8)		Limited-English-proficiency children
39	84.290	Bilingual Education–Comprehensive School Grants		X ($63)		Limited-English-proficiency children
40	84.291	Bilingual Education–Systemwide Improvement Grants		X ($70.7)		Limited-English-proficiency children
41	84.292	Bilingual Education–Research Programs		X ($1.3)		Limited-English-proficiency children
42	84.295	Ready to Learn Television		X ($7)		Young children
43	84.296	Native Hawaiian Community Based Education Learning Centers		X ($1)		Native Hawaiian infants, children, and their families
44	84.297	Native Hawaiian Curriculum Development, Teacher Training, and Recruitment,		X ($2.5)		Native Hawaiian children and teachers

ENCLOSURE II

Count	CFDA[a] no.	Program name	Formula grants	Discretionary grants[b]	Other[c]	Targeted beneficiaries
45	84.298	Innovative Education Program Strategies	X ($310)			Students grades K-12
46	84.302	Regional Technical Support and Professional Development Consortia		X ($10)		Students grades K-12
47	84.303	Technology Challenge Grants		X ($57)		Disadvantaged students K-12
48	84.305	National Institute on Student Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment		X ($14.8)		Students and teachers
49	84.306	National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students		X ($14.8)		Dissemination activities for at-risk students
50	84.307	National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education		X ($8)		Dissemination activities for young children
51	84.308	National Institute on Governance, Finance, Policymaking, and Management		X ($7.5)		Dissemination activities for students
52	84.310	Goals 2000–Parental Assistance Program		X ($15)		Students grades K-12 and their parents
53	84.319	Eisenhower Regional Mathematics and Science Education Consortia		X ($15)		Students and teachers
54	84.320	Alaska Native Educational Planning, Curriculum Development, Teacher Training, and Recruitment		X ($1)		Alaska native students

Count	CFDA[a] no.	Program name	Formula grants	Discretionary grants[b]	Other[c]	Targeted beneficiaries
55	84.322	Alaska Native Student Enrichment Program		X ($1)		Alaska native elementary students in rural areas

[a]Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance, 1997.

[b]Includes competitive grants, contracts, and cooperative agreements.

[c]Includes direct payments for specified uses of funds and for dissemination costs.

Table II.3: Education Department Programs With Either Direct or Indirect Assistance for K-12 Students as the Primary Purpose With FY 97 Grant Amount (in Millions)

Count	CFDA[a] no.	Program name	Formula grants	Discretionary grants[b]	Other[c]	Targeted beneficiaries
1	84.041	Impact Aid			($730)	Children in local educational agencies (LEAs) negatively affected by federal activity
2	84.060	Indian Education Grants to Local School Districts		X ($58)		Indian children in LEA or Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools
3	84.083	Women's Educational Equity Act Program		X ($2)		Children and adults
4	84.196	Education for Homeless Children and Youth	X ($25)			Homeless preschool and school-aged children and their families

[a]Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance, 1997.

[b]Includes competitive grants, contracts, and cooperative agreements.

[c]Includes direct payments for specified uses of funds and for dissemination costs.

The information in these tables results from our analysis of programs funded in fiscal year 1997 that were administered by the Department of Education.[9] The classifications in your request–direct and indirect instructional assistance–are not those used by the Department of Education, nor are they categories that we have used in the past. Instead, we used the definition implied in the request letter that programs primarily targeting the three activities listed–or similar ones–constituted indirect instructional assistance. We considered other instructional assistance to be direct–that is, instructional staff (teachers and aides), salaries, and instructional materials.

[9]We limited our analysis to Department of Education programs because of time constraints.

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To identify these programs, we reviewed the Department of Education entries in the 1997 CFDA. A word of caution: The titles of programs can be misleading. For example, the Early Education for Children with Disabilities program sounds as if it should be a direct instruction program targeted to disabled children aged 0-8. However, we classified it as indirect assistance based on analyses of the CFDA description of program objectives and uses and use restrictions. In this program, awards are made for "research, demonstration, training, technical assistance and other activities," not for direct instructional services.

We eliminated programs (1) that targeted infants, toddlers, and preschoolers and postsecondary and adult populations; (2) that had a primary purpose of data gathering, such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress; (3) that provided rehabilitation to adults with disabilities; and (4) that were not funded in fiscal year 1997. As a result of these eliminations, our current analysis identified a much smaller number of education programs than we reported in our 1995 testimony. The 1995 number included several of the categories we eliminated in our current analysis, such as programs targeting postsecondary students.

TITLE I

Information Requested

Please provide me with current data to show how the Title I program is working since its most recent revision in the 1994 reauthorization, if you have such information.

Response

We have not undertaken a comprehensive review of the way in which Title I has been working since it was revised in the 1994 reauthorization, but we have discussed with Department of Education officials efforts of its Planning and Evaluation Service to evaluate Title I since its recent revision.[10] They provided us with a list of studies, now in progress, that seek to examine the way Title I is currently working.[11] In addition, Department officials provided us with a recently completed report by the Urban Institute on education reform that includes information on some aspects of Title I.[12]

Studies now underway to examine the current operation of Title I are linked to program objectives developed by the Department of Education in a Performance Indicator Plan. This plan links Title I program objectives to specific indicators to assess whether program objectives were met. It also links the various studies, which will collect data to be used in such indicators, to these objectives. The studies related to Title I program assessment are shown in the following list supplied by the Department of Education.

1. An analysis of Title I state performance reports for assessment results will be conducted annually. Baseline data will be included in a report published through the Council of Chief State School Officers, which is scheduled for release no later than February 1998.

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[10]The Elementary and Secondary Education Act includes a mandate for the Department of Education to conduct a national evaluation of the program. See U.S. Department of Education, Mapping Out the National Assessment of Title I: The Interim Report (n.p.: 1996).

[11]The scope of our review did not include activities of the Title I program office to assess how the program is operating.

[12]Urban Institute, Reports on Reform From the Field: District and State Survey Results, Final Report (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1997).

2. A National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) trend analysis and state-by-state comparison of student performance in high-poverty schools will be available in February 1998.

3. An examination of trend data in urban school districts that looks at selected districts with 3 years of achievement results will be released during the spring 1998.

4. A reanalysis of TIMSS (Third International Mathematics and Science Study), focusing on high-poverty schools, will be released during spring 1998.

5. Longitudinal information through the Longitudinal Evaluation of School Change and Performance (LESCP), supplemented with data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Schools (NLSS), will also include trends in student achievement. One-year change in student achievement results, collected through the LESCP, will first be reported in January 1999. The NLSS will report baseline results in spring 1999.

6. The LESCP mandated under Title I is evaluating the impact of the key features of Title I legislation on schools, classrooms, and students. The evaluation examines a specially selected sample of 71 Title I elementary schools and tracks the impact of key features of the new legislation–such as standards-based curriculum and schoolwide programs–on both instructional practices and student achievement. The content areas of central importance are reading and mathematics. The first baseline report, which focuses on classroom practices, will be available in early spring 1998. Annual reports will follow, with a final report due in 2001.

7. The National Longitudinal Survey of Schools will complement the LESCP with a nationally representative survey examining how well Title I schools are implementing standards-based improvements. The study will also look at the extent to which schools use their outcome data to change classroom practice and how they measure progress continuously. The first and second interim reports are due in spring and fall 1999. A final report will be submitted in 2000.

8. Baseline and Follow-up Studies of State-Level Planning and Implementation of Title I and Other Federal Programs provide information regarding the planning process and early implementation of Title I, other state-administered programs under Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), and Goals 2000. Key issues include the process of developing state plans, setting standards, implementing accountability systems, and providing support to districts. The final report for the baseline study is expected in February 1998. The follow-up study will collect information in spring 1998, and a final report is due in early 1999.

9. An Evaluation of Federal Efforts to Assist School Reform has collected indicators, from the customers' perspective, of the federal government's performance in promoting improved state-, local-, and school-level practices under Title I and other federally supported efforts. How the field has responded to the Department of Education's new authority to waive statutes and regulations is a particular focus. A final report, Reports on Reform from the Field, was released in fall 1997.

10. Study of Local Implementation will analyze districts' implementation of Title I and other federally supported efforts. The study will focus on issues related to local planning and implementation of federal programs–specifically standards and assessments, professional development, parental involvement and community engagement, and targeting. The study will be completed in late fall 1998.

11. An Evaluation of Title I Participation of Private School Students surveyed a nationally representative sample of district and private school representatives to examine the issues in allocation procedures and consultation regarding the participation of private school students. A final report is expected in winter 1998.

12. A Title I Targeting Study is examining how districts allocate Title I funds to schools, the poverty data used to determine eligibility, and exceptions made to the rules governing allocations. An examination of changes in how districts allocate funds and the effects of individual targeting provisions will draw upon existing LEA records from a sample of districts. A final report is expected in February 1998.

13. A Targeting and Resource Allocation Study will examine how Title I and other federal resources are used at the school and district levels; how the allocation and use of resources varies by poverty; how resources are allocated for specific strategies emphasized in the law (e.g., schoolwide programs, professional development, and parent involvement); how resource allocation decisions are made; and the share of funds used for administration, instruction, and other functions. A contract for the study was awarded in fall 1997, and a final report is due in January 1999.

14. The Study of Barriers to Parent Involvement presents findings on common barriers to effective parent involvement in Title I schools. It also reports on policies and programs that have overcome these barriers and improved parent involvement and the performance of participating children. An idea book for educational practitioners and policymakers follows from the findings. The study was completed in winter 1997.

15. The Study of the Impact of Title I Schoolwide Programs on Migrant Children examines the extent to which schoolwide programs affect learning opportunities for

migrant students. Because schoolwide programs enable all students to benefit from Title I resources, these programs may facilitate access to services for migrant students. At issue, however, is the concern that the unique needs of migrant students may not be met. An interim report was submitted to the Congress in January 1998, with a final report to follow in spring 1998.

The recently completed Urban Institute report results from a mandate in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as recently reauthorized, and is also intended to inform the National Assessment of Title I. The study solicited feedback from states and school districts on (1) their progress in implementing federally supported reforms, (2) areas for which more information and assistance is needed, and (3) the kind of assistance they find most useful. According to Department officials, the Department is using information from this study to better target future technical assistance to school districts. For example, the study has revealed that the strategy for providing technical assistance to small districts may need to be strengthened. Moreover, the study indicates that high poverty districts may benefit from assistance on effective ways to improve student achievement. We are enclosing a copy of the report with this correspondence.

BALANCING ACCOUNTABILITY AND FLEXIBILITY

Information Requested

Please provide further information on the "catch 22" that federal policy makers often face in wanting both accountability for state expenditures of federal funds and flexibility for states and localities in meeting identified needs. This challenge seems particularly true for the block grant approach. You mention that significant information gaps exist and that gaps often result from not putting "strings" on program funds to require data collection. As alluded to in your testimony, the data you view as necessary to judge program effectiveness would create a paperwork burden at the state and local level and raise costs at the federal level. Please comment further on this issue.

Response

The challenge referred to in our testimony is the necessity to balance federal accountability needs with state and local flexibility in implementing programs. Flexible programs, such as block grants, give substantial discretion over program design and implementation to state and local levels. Under block grants, program management and oversight responsibilities shift from the federal level to state and local levels. As a result, management and oversight information does not automatically flow to the federal level. At the same time, decisionmakers need to know if the overall federal effort is accomplishing its mission, such as preventing substance abuse among youths. The narrowly defined program purposes and federally prescribed administrative requirements of categorical programs, such as planning and fiscal reporting, are replaced by broad program objectives and limits on federal administrative requirements.[13]

This absence of reporting requirements and broad program objective can result in less information available to federal policymakers about how well a program is performing and whether it is achieving its objectives. For example, block grants enacted as part of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981 lacked uniform national program reporting requirements. As states implemented the block grants, each collected information relevant to its own needs. The resulting variations in available data made it difficult to assess, from a national perspective, effects of the block grants or to comparatively assess the effectiveness of different states' strategies.[14] Broad program objectives and the lack of standardized reporting requirements can impede the assessment

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[13]See Block Grants: Issues in Designing Accountability Provisions (GAO/AIMD-95-226, Sept. 1, 1995).

[14]See GAO/AIMD-95-226, Sept. 1, 1995.

of a program's impact nationally in other types of flexible programs as well. The Safe and Drug-Free Schools program is an example of this.

The Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1994, Title IV of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, gives substantial authority to the state and local levels to identify problems, design programs, and allocate resources to prevent youth violence and drug abuse. Federal reporting requirements are minimal. For example, the only required state reports for the state and local grants programs are the triennial reports to the Department of Education on the implementation, outcomes, effectiveness, and progress of state and local programs. Although the Department of Education has provided states with suggested program performance indicators to use in preparing the triennial reports, we found that the variability in state data collection efforts may prevent some states from providing the suggested information. The Department faces a difficult challenge in assembling the triennial reports so that a nationwide picture of the program's effectiveness emerges.[15]

We are currently conducting a study of flexible programs throughout government that examines issues of design, flexibility, accountability, and information in detail. Preliminary findings from this study will be included in testimony for the Senate Budget Committee Education Task Force early in February 1998. We expect to issue our report later in the spring. We also have several ongoing studies that address issues of regulatory burden and administrative cost in education programs. We will be pleased to share the results of these studies with you when they are released next summer.

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[15]See Safe and Drug-Free Schools: Balancing Accountability With State and Local Flexibility (GAO/HEHS-98-3, Oct. 10, 1997).

PERFORMANCE PARTNERSHIPS

Information Requested

Please provide additional information on the Performance Partnership Grants mentioned in your testimony.

Response

Both the Congress and the administration have expressed an interest in performance partnerships as one strategy for balancing the need for federal accountability with the need for state and local flexibility. For example, in the administration's proposals for performance partnerships in the 1998 budget, it refers to performance partnership grants as consolidated funding streams in which performance is measured in terms of program outcomes. Another feature of these partnerships is the relationship between federal, state, and local governments and service providers: these stakeholders jointly design the program, establish performance measures, and assess results.

The Education Flexibility Partnership Demonstration Program ("Ed-Flex"), in which 12 states have been given limited authority to waive certain federal requirements affecting local school districts and schools, might be considered an example of this kind of program. However, as we noted in recent correspondence, although Ed-Flex can provide districts with more flexibility, the authority to grant waivers is restricted to specific requirements within specific programs; it does not allow consolidated funding streams.[16] In addition, the Ed-Flex demonstration is generally not structured to simplify the challenge of obtaining the information necessary to characterize multiple federal programs or evaluate their effect. We have work under way that will provide more information on Ed-Flex in the fall of 1998.

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[16]See Education Programs: Information on the Ed-Flex Demonstration Project (GAO/HEHS-98-61R, Dec. 15, 1997).

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